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SUBJECT: VOTE COUNT ONGOING, POSSIBLE FRAUD CONCERNS BOTH SIDES

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REASON: 1.4 (d)

VOTE COUNT ONGOING, POSSIBLE FRAUD CONCERNS BOTH SIDES

1.(C)Summary: Vote counting is still ongoing for the two major elections in Iran, but some provinces have reported final results. In the Tehran Assembly of Experts competition, the final results showed an even higher count for frontrunner Expediency Council chairman Rafsanjani, leading a list of 16 elected members with over 1.5 million votes. Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazdi came in sixth place, and many of his supporters were vetted out from the campaign. According to multiple sources, the Supreme Leader encouraged Rafsanjani to run and promised him a clean election. What is particularly noteworthy is this result seems indicative of an interesting switch from the situation that contacts had been describing for months, that the Supreme Leader saw Rafsanjani as his primary threat and that he overestimated his ability to keep Mesbah-Yazdi boxed in. Partial results for the Tehran municipal elections suggest that supporters of Tehran mayor Qalibaf have fared well, possibly gaining a majority. Ahmadinejad supporters seem likely to win as few as two seats on the fifteen-member council. Ballots are being counted manually in Tehran, which may account for the delay in results. Both reformers and conservatives have expressed concern over possible fraud or other voting irregularities. End summary.

Supreme Leader no longer threatened by Rafsanjani?

2.(C) For months, contacts have told us that the Supreme Leader was erroneously focusing his attention on destroying his primary rival, who he saw to be Expediency Council chair Rafsanjani, while at the same time overestimating his ability to contain arch-conservative Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazdi. However, the results of the Assembly of Experts elections would indicate that perhaps Khamenei has had a change of view. Multiple sources say that the Supreme Leader encouraged Rafsanjani to run and even promised him that no one would interfere with his campaign. At the same time, a number of Mesbah-Yazdi supporters were vetted out of the Assembly of Experts race. Nonetheless, it is possible the Supreme Leader was not counting on Rafsanjani

winning so decisively. In the final vote count, Rafsanjani came in first with over 1.5 million votes, outpacing the next person on the list by over 500,000 votes. Many observers are hailing this as a revival for the Expediency Council chairman, who suffered humiliating defeats in elections for the Majles and presidency, in 2000 and 2005 respectively.

3.(S//NF) An Iranian-American, a long-term contact who travels frequently to Iran and was there during the election, repeated to IRPOff a similar story as in reftel about Khamenei encouraging a reluctant Rafsanjani to run in the election. The Amcit, who claims an acquaintanceship with one of Rafsanjani's sons, said he heard from associates that Rafsanjani consulted Khamenei about whether to run for the Assembly of Experts, and Khamenei said that he should, perhaps in order to increase voter turnout. Rafsanjani elicited a promise from Khamenei that there would be no interference in the election from the IRGC, but this promise was not kept, the source said. On the day after the election, the Amcit claimed he was supposed to meet Rafsanjani's son, but heard instead there was controversy over how Rafsanjani had fared and the meeting did not take place. Reportedly, Rafsanjani thought he was in first place, when he received a call from Supreme Council for National Security head Larijani congratulating him for his fourth place showing. According to the Amcit, Rafsanjani then called Interior Minister Purmohammadi and sent his son Yasser to the Interior Ministry. Later that night, they got news he had come in first place. The Amcit pondered why the Interior Minister, who is close to Ahmadinejad, might have opted not to interfere with Rafsanjani.

Result delay in municipal elections due to manual counting

4.(U) In the race for Tehran's municipal council, results have been delayed. Domestic press has reported that the interior and electoral supervisory board of the city council disagreed over whether votes should be counted manually or by computer. The officials reportedly eventually agreed on manual counting, which may be responsible for the delay in results. Partial results

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indicate a possible majority of seats on the 15-member council going to supporters of pragmatic conservative Tehran mayor Qalibaf, with Ahmadinejad's supporters winning as few as two seats, and the remainder, possibly four or five seats, going to reformers.

Both sides fear interference or fraud

5.(U) Both conservatives and reformers have expressed concern about fraud or other irregularities. Ahmadinejad's supporters have called for a recount of ballots for the Tehran municipal council, despite the fact that the final count has not been announced. At the same time, reformers have expressed concern about the delays in vote counting in Tehran. The reformers claim that manual vote counting is against electoral law since it requires ballots to be transported from the polling station, and that counting is not being properly supervised. The moderate reform National Trust Party called on the Interior Ministry to investigate specific complaints, including reports that representatives of reform candidates were barred from polling stations, while Ahmadinejad's supporters were permitted to distribute leaflets. There are also allegations that some candidates' names were left off the ballot in the city of Mashhad, and that the Tehran Friday prayers pulpit was used inappropriately the day of the election as a campaign venue after campaigns were supposed to have ceased. Reformist candidates in the Tehran municipal elections have reportedly sent a letter of protest to Majles speaker Haddad-Adel, complaining about the post-election process.

6.(S//NF) The Amcit said he heard that prior to the elections, Guardian Council chair Jannati tried to avoid having elections inspectors, or at least a smaller number. According to the contact, multiple sources said that when inspectors arrived at elections headquarters to get their badges, they encountered

problems, and many left the headquarters frustrated and went home.

7.(C) Comment: The Supreme Leader - Rafsanjani - Ahmadinejad relationship remains as murky as ever. Some contacts have said that the Supreme Leader has suffered in terms of support as a result of standing by Ahmadinejad. How he views the landslide win of Rafsanjani, his perennial rival, is unknown. The Assembly of Experts as an entity will not provoke any immediate change to Iran's political scene, but it will be interesting to watch how or if Rafsanjani asserts himself politically in the coming weeks, bolstered by his big win. Several contacts, as well as numerous press reports have termed this moment a "turning point" in Ahmadinejad's fate as a politician. Although Rafsanjani's win and the partial municipal council results suggest a political setback for Ahmadinejad, it is too early to predict whether this apparent downturn in his political fortunes is permanent or whether he can regroup.

8.(C) Comment con't: Allegations of fraud or other electoral violations appear increasingly serious as the vote count delay continues. However, as with the 2005 presidential election, there will likely never be a complete public accounting for the allegations. Nonetheless, the allegations will continue to provide rhetorical fodder for politicians from all sides. Presumably, Ahmadinejad and his government would have been the best placed to carry out vote manipulation, which makes his relative defeat even more significant.

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